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How can I structure my Academic Poster for Health, Wellbeing and Lifestyles in Early Years?

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Health, Wellbeing, and Lifestyles

Introduction

The early years are an important stage in children’s growth and development, as experiences during this period can influence lifelong health and wellbeing. Child health is not only linked to physical development but also includes emotional, mental and social wellbeing, demonstrating the holistic nature of children’s health (World Health Organization, 2023). Therefore, promoting positive health, wellbeing and lifestyles in early years is essential to supporting children’s overall development.

Research suggests that the foundations of lifelong health are developed in early childhood, with positive experiences and supportive environments contributing to future wellbeing (Harvard University, 2010). According to Wales Centre for Public Policy (2022), healthy lifestyle behaviours, including balanced nutrition, physical activity, sleep and emotional support, can positively influence children’s health outcomes. This highlights the important role of early years practitioners in supporting children’s health and wellbeing through positive relationships, healthy routines and enabling environments.

This poster will explore the concepts of health, wellbeing and lifestyles, considering the factors that influence children’s development and the role of legislation, guidance, curriculum frameworks and early years practitioners in supporting positive outcomes.

Definition of Concepts

Health and wellbeing are holistic concepts that are essential to children’s growth, learning and development. Health refers to a child’s physical, emotional and social well-being, rather than simply the absence of illness, with early experiences playing an important role in shaping future outcomes (Public Health England, 2016). Wellbeing includes children feeling safe, healthy, supported and able to develop positive relationships, all of which contribute to overall development and quality of life (Harbottle, 2023).

Lifestyles refers to behaviours and routines that influence children’s health and wellbeing. In early childhood, this includes healthy eating, physical activity, sleep patterns and social experiences, which are often shaped by family, environment and wider social influences (Mollborn *et al.*, 2014). Developing positive lifestyle behaviours in the early years can support long-term health and wellbeing outcomes.

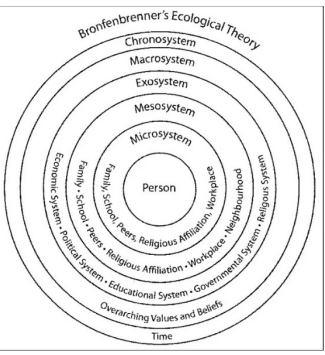
Understanding health, wellbeing and lifestyles as interconnected concepts highlights the importance of early years practice in promoting positive development and enabling children to thrive.

Wellbeing

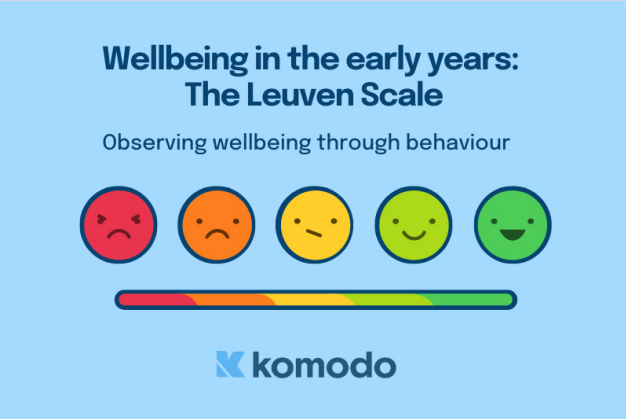
According to Harbottle (2023), positive well-being during early childhood is important in supporting children’s confidence, behaviour, relationships and future mental health outcomes. Hong *et al.*, (2014) and Visnjic Jevtic and Viskovic, (2025) further highlight children’s perspectives of wellbeing, suggesting that children often associate wellbeing with happiness, feeling safe and having positive relationships, highlighting the importance of nurturing environments and emotional security in early years settings. Dodge *et al.*, (2012) further suggest that wellbeing may be understood as a balance between the challenges children experience and the emotional and social resources available to support them. This may highlight the importance of responsive relationships and the supportive environments in helping children develop positive wellbeing outcomes.

Secure relationships play a significant role in supporting emotional wellbeing. Bowlby’s attachment theory suggests that responsive and consistent caregiving helps children develop feelings of safety and trust, supporting emotional resilience and emotional regulation (Bowlby, 1979; Bretherton, 1992). Within early years settings, the role of the key person can help children develop secure attachments and feel emotionally supported (Birth to 5 Matters, 2021). This may suggest that emotionally secure and consistent relationships are fundamental in supporting children’s confidence, resilience and overall wellbeing. Similarly, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs highlights the importance of safety, belonging and emotional security in supporting children’s confidence and wellbeing (Gould, 2024). Montessori approaches further emphasise calm, respectful and nurturing environments to support children’s emotional well-being and independence (Maria Montessori Institute, 2024; Lillard *et al.*, 2021). Taken together, these perspectives reinforce the importance of nurturing environments in supporting children’s emotional wellbeing and holistic development.

According to Bedford and Coussins (2024), children’s wellbeing may also be influenced by wider environmental and social factors, including family relationships, poverty and experiences of care and education. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory further highlights how children’s emotional wellbeing can be shaped through interactions between home, early years settings and wider social systems (Tong and An, 2024). Furthermore, this may highlight the importance of recognising children’s emotional and mental wellbeing within the early years, as positive early experiences and support may influence future outcomes. BPS Communications (2026) and the Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project (2008) state that mental wellbeing in the early years is increasingly recognised as important, with early support helping to reduce later emotional and behavioural difficulties. Moorhouse (2024) highlights that observation tools such as the Leuven Wellbeing Scale can support practitioners in recognising children’s wellbeing and involvement to better understand individual needs. Therefore, wellbeing is closely connected to children’s health and lifestyle behaviours established during early childhood.



Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory
Nicholas (2011).



The Leuven Scale
(Longley, 2024)

Health

Positive health experiences during early childhood are important as they can influence lifelong outcomes, with early childhood recognised as a critical period for growth and development (Harvard University, 2010). According to Schmeer and Yoon (2016), children’s health is shaped by a range of interconnected factors, including home environments, socioeconomic circumstances and access to support services. Poor housing conditions and environmental stressors may negatively affect children’s health and development. The Royal Foundation (2021) further highlights the importance of the early years, emphasising that experiences during this period can significantly influence children’s future health, learning and relationships.

Evidence suggests that wider social inequalities, including poverty, can also impact opportunities for healthy development, contributing to differences in health outcomes between children (Marmot, 2010; Marmot *et al.*, 2020). Children growing up in disadvantaged circumstances may experience barriers to accessing nutritious food, healthcare, safe environments and early support services (Cribb, 2022; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2026). According to Public Health England (2017) these may be understood as social determinants of health, recognising that wider environmental and socioeconomic conditions can shape children’s development from an early age. This may also align with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, which suggests that children’s physiological and safety needs, including nutrition, healthcare and stable environments, should be met to support healthy development (Gould, 2024).

Dahlgren and Whitehead (2007) suggest that children’s health outcomes are influenced by multiple layers of social and environmental factors beyond the family environment, including community networks and broader social systems. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory, which highlights how children’s health is influenced by interactions between family, community and wider systems including policy and economic conditions (Tong and An, 2024; Fisher and Lombardi, 2025). Therefore, promoting children’s health requires a holistic understanding of the wider influences that may affect development and well-being.

Access to healthcare, early support services and positive early experiences can further influence children’s health outcomes. Early intervention is recognised as important in identifying potential concerns and promoting healthy development, helping to ensure children receive the support needed to achieve positive long-term outcomes (World Health Organization, 2023; Public Health England, 2016). Therefore, children’s health is closely connected to emotional wellbeing and the lifestyle behaviours established during the early years.

Lifestyles

Lifestyle behaviours established during early childhood can significantly influence children's long-term health and well-being. Healthy routines, including balanced nutrition, physical activity, quality sleep and positive social experiences, can support physical, emotional and cognitive development (Wales Centre for Public Policy, 2022; Mollborn *et al.*, 2014). From this perspective, healthy lifestyle behaviour may support children's fundamental physical and emotional needs, reinforcing the importance of establishing positive routines during early childhood (Gould, 2024). Research suggests that positive lifestyle habits established during the early years may contribute to healthier outcomes across childhood and into adulthood (Harvard University, 2010).

Schwarzinger *et al.*, (2024) suggests that the concept of lifestyle has developed overtime, although its meaning is not always consistently defined. According to Brivio *et al.*, (2023) lifestyle is often understood through patterns of behaviours that may influence health and wellbeing, including eating habits, movement, sleep and social experiences. This may highlight that children's lifestyles are shaped not only by personal behaviours but also through experiences and opportunities available within their environment.

According to Jensen (2014) and Brivio *et al.*, (2023) children's lifestyle are shaped by family circumstances, culture and wider environmental influences rather than individual choice alone. Research by Mollborn *et al.*, (2014) suggests that children's lifestyle behaviours during early childhood are often shaped through a combination of parental influence, environmental opportunities and children's developing independence. This may further highlight that young children have limited control over lifestyle choices, with opportunities for healthy eating, physical activity and positive routines often influenced by the adults and environments around them. Furthermore, poverty and inequality may limit access to healthy food, safe outdoor spaces and opportunities for physical activity, which can negatively affect healthy development (Cribb, 2022; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2026). According to Marmot (2010) and Marmot *et al.*, (2020) wider social inequalities can contribute to differences in children's health outcomes from an early age.

This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, which emphasises how children's experiences and behaviours are influenced through interactions between family, community and wider systems (Fisher and Lombardi, 2025). Therefore, promoting positive lifestyle habits in the early years requires a holistic approach that recognises the wider social and environmental factors shaping children's opportunities for healthy development and long-term wellbeing.

Application

Supporting children's development requires early years practitioners to recognise how health, wellbeing and lifestyle behaviours are interconnected and influenced by wider environmental and social factors. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory highlights how children are shaped through interactions between family, early years settings and wider systems, reinforcing the importance of adopting a holistic approach to practice (Tong and An, 2024; Fisher and Lombardi, 2025). This suggests that practitioners should consider not only children's immediate needs but also the wider circumstances that may influence development.

Secure relationships and positive experiences are central to supporting children's outcomes. Attachment theory suggests that responsive and consistent caregiving may promote emotional security and resilience, supporting children's wellbeing and confidence (Bowlby, 1979; Bretherton, 1992). Within early years settings, the key person approach enables practitioners to build trusting relationships and provide consistency and emotional support for children (Birth to 5 Matters, 2021). In addition, Maslow's hierarchy of needs suggests that children's physical and emotional needs should be met to support learning and development reinforcing the importance of safe, nurturing and inclusive environments (Gould, 2024).

Practitioners also play an important role in promoting healthy lifestyle behaviours through encouraging balanced nutrition, physical activity, emotional wellbeing and positive experiences (Public Health England, 2016). The Curriculum for Wales places health and wellbeing as a key area of learning, recognising the importance of supporting children to develop healthy relationships, resilience and informed lifestyle choices from an early age (Welsh Government, 2020). Early years environments and pedagogical approaches may also influence children's health and wellbeing. According to Alkhudhair, (2014) The Reggio Emilia approach emphasises creativity, exploration and child-led learning, promoting environments that support children's confidence, emotional expression and engagement in learning. Furthermore, the Early Years Outcomes Framework highlights the importance of supporting positive outcomes for children through collaborative and preventative approaches (Welsh Government, 2015).

Observation tools, including the Leuven Wellbeing Scale, can support practitioners in recognising children's emotional needs, wellbeing and early indicators of mental health concerns to provide responsive support (Moorhouse, 2024). However, some children may experience barriers to positive outcomes due to poverty, housing inequalities or limited access to services (Marmot, 2010; Marmot *et al.*, 2020; Cribb, 2022). Therefore, collaborative multi-agency working may further strengthen outcomes for children and families through joined up support between education, health and social care professionals, helping to ensure children receive appropriate and timely support (Solomon, 2019).

Conclusion

This poster highlights the interconnected nature of children's health, wellbeing and lifestyles and the importance of recognising how these areas collectively influence children's development and future outcomes. Evidence discussed throughout demonstrates that children's experiences during the early years may significantly affect physical, emotional and social development, reinforcing the importance of positive early intervention and support.

The discussion has highlighted that children's health is influenced not only by physical factors, but also by wider environmental and socioeconomic circumstances, including poverty, housing and access to support services. Similarly, wellbeing is shaped through secure relationships, emotional security and nurturing environments that support children's confidence, resilience and sense of belonging. Furthermore, positive lifestyle behaviours established in early childhood, including healthy eating, physical activity and supportive routines, may contribute to improved long-term outcomes.

This poster also demonstrates the important role of early years practitioners in supporting children through responsive care, enabling environments and collaborative partnerships with families and professionals. Adopting a holistic approach is essential in recognising the complexity of children's needs and promoting positive opportunities for children to thrive.

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